



CONNECTICUT  
LEGAL  
RIGHTS  
PROJECT, INC.

TESTIMONY OF KATHLEEN FLAHERTY, ESQ.  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CT LEGAL RIGHTS PROJECT, INC.  
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
FEBRUARY 19, 2016

REGARDING H.B. 5044, AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES  
FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017

**OPPOSE** CUTS TO JUDICIAL BRANCH FUNDING

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

Good afternoon. My name is Kathy Flaherty, and I am the Executive Director of Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP), a statewide non-profit agency that provides legal services to low income adults with serious mental health conditions. I am testifying today about the proposed changes to the Judicial Branch's budget not only as it may impact CLRP, but also as it will impact everyone who must use Connecticut's court system to assert their legal claims, most especially Connecticut's low-income residents.

The mission of the Connecticut Judicial Branch is "to serve the interests of justice and the public by resolving matters brought before it in a fair, timely, efficient and open manner." In order to serve the interests of justice, the Branch must be able to provide access to justice.

It is without question that finding a resolution to Connecticut's long-standing budget challenges will be a daunting process. As the legislature considers the cuts that have been proposed to the Judicial Branch budget, I urge you to consider the impact that an 11% cut will have on the ability of the Judicial Branch to serve the interests of justice and the public. Pursuant to C.G.S. § 51-81c, the judges of the Superior Court designated the Connecticut Bar Foundation to administer two programs funded through the Judicial Branch – the Branch's Court Fees Grant-In-Aid program, and the Judicial Branch's Grants-In-Aid program. The funding CLRP receives from the Connecticut Bar Foundation through these two programs provides the financial support needed to cover necessary expenses in representing community clients on all non-housing cases related to the goal of promoting successful community integration for our clients. The work funded indirectly through the judicial branch protects our clients' rights under state and federal laws and has implications for the health and stability of vulnerable persons, the cost-effective use of limited state resources, and the overall well-being of our society. Low-income individuals with mental illness often need legal assistance to obtain the individualized services and supports

that they need to maintain stability and sustain recovery, to exercise self-determination, and to obtain equal access to educational and employment opportunities.

CLRP, similar to the other nine civil legal service providers in Connecticut who receive funding support through the CBF to serve and protect the legal rights of Connecticut's low-income population, has seen demand for services continue to increase since 2007. We already lack the ability to serve everyone who asks us for help. I would ask you to take note that the governor's budget proposes cutting funding for civil legal services in Connecticut in every agency budget that funds it – whether through these cuts to the Judicial Branch, through the DMHAS Legal Services Line item that funds CLRP's representation of patients who reside in state-operated hospitals (pursuant to a Consent Decree) and clients in housing matters, or the SSBG funds which support the work of Connecticut Legal Services, Greater Hartford Legal Aid, and New Haven Legal Assistance in the DSS budget, or cuts in the DOH budget that would affect the Connecticut Fair Housing Center.

I ask you to remember not only the impact these budget cuts will have on the clients we serve, but even more the devastating impact they may have on all those individuals we are unable to serve who still must utilize the Judicial Branch to assert their legal rights as self-represented parties. The Judicial Branch effort to provide access to justice has included enhancement of court service centers, administrative support for in-court pro bono programs sponsored by the Connecticut Bar Association and others, and technical support provided to litigants who represent themselves. The proposed cuts to the Judicial Branch budget will clearly affect all of these methods of providing service, and access to justice, to Connecticut residents. A court system that is inadequately funded will not be able to provide services, much less justice, to those people relying on it to address their most basic needs.

Connecticut's courts must remain open, accessible and fair to all of Connecticut's residents.